

I Live in a Language That's Not Mine

By Carmen Rodriguez

The mirror is a good place for looking. I hated myself when I was a kid. All I could see were the big teeth and the glasses. After all these years, I am more gentle with myself, and sometimes I even like what I see. Again, brief instances of centredness, contentment. But the interesting thing is that since living in Canada I have been forced to see something that I had never seen before: colour. In Chile I didn't have a colour. I was like everybody else. Colour was not an issue. Here, I have been forced to see myself as a dark woman, "a woman of colour."

Do I like this term? Can I live with it? Sometimes I can, sometimes I can't. I can live with it when it brings me close to other women who may have gone through experiences similar to mine, women who live in the margins of this society because of the colour of their skin. Then I like it. I cannot live with it when I realize that it is a term largely determined by the fact that there is a dominant colour and culture that not only I am not a part of, but that looks down on me and others like me.

But if society wants to define me, "put me in my place," by pointing to the colour of my skin and my accent, there is little I can do about it. Call me what you wish. What I do know is that I am a lot more complex than what you see or hear. I have several cards up my sleeve, and I may choose not to show them to you. I am a traveller, a wanderer. I live in a language that's not mine, in a country that's not mine. But who doesn't? Perhaps "home" is only a search interrupted by brief moments of contentedness. Perhaps home is nothing but my own dark skin, reflected in the Canadian mirror of my here and now. Perhaps.